

Rod Rodriguez ([00:02](#)):

What's up everyone. I'm rod Rodriguez. One half of the military matters. We're very excited to be working on season two of the show. And while we're getting it ready, you've noticed we've been producing fast takes. Now we're going to share one of our favorite podcasts with you. But before we begin this episode, I want to remind you all that military matters needs your help. All you have to do to help keep the show going is leave us a review on Spotify or Apple podcasts. That's it. It's that simple. Those reviews help the show grow and reach new audiences. And if you want to go the extra mile, share this podcast on your social media, that's always appreciated. And you guys mean the world to us so thank you for the tons of support. So I'm going to be a bit selfish on this episode. I hope you don't mind.

Rod Rodriguez ([00:44](#)):

In addition to military matters, I'm also a podcast producer for another awesome military new site called connecting vets. I produce a show called vets story. Now the idea of the show is to tell the stories of veterans through their words, not mine. So while we continue to work on season two of military matters, enjoy this episode of vet story. You can find vet story everywhere You listen to podcasts. All right, here we go,

Rod Rodriguez ([01:16](#)):

every veteran left their respective service with a story. Some are war stories. Some are stories of finding peace. There are stories of love, hate and loss. This season, we're talking about stories that changed our lives, changed who we were and who we are. These are real stories from real vets. This isn't fluff because our lives aren't fluff. They're real. They're stories about us and what we've been through. You'll hear stories about surviving our past making decisions that affect our entire future. And along the way, you'll hear stories from off the beaten path that may surprise you. You might notice that I don't show up very often during these stories. And that's because I want you to hear their story in their words, not mine. Welcome to vet story. I'm rod Rodriguez,

Rod Rodriguez ([01:45](#)):

Vincent Rocco Vargas looks like a tough guy. He even plays one on the television show. Mayans MC he's a former army ranger, a drill Sergeant border patrol officer. And now he's an actor writer and podcaster many veterans know him as part of the iconic article, 15 crew. But over the last couple of years, Vincent has found some things more defining, more personal in his own words, he's grown up a lot. And part of that growing is coming to terms with the man he was, and the man he wants to become, this is Vincent Vargas and this is his vet story.

Vincent Vargas ([02:45](#)):

Yep. Standby. Let me just make sure the Yeti's good. Boom. Good. Everything's good. Uh, my name is Vincent Vargas originally was 11 Bravo, Uh, army ranger for first four years of my career. And then I transitioned into the reserves and became a drill. Sergeant did that for many years. And then I did a small stint as a psyop 37 Fox reclassified and then got promoted right back into a drill Sergeant unit. And that's kind of where I'm at right now. I'm in a weird position in the military where I can either medically retire or I can continue my career just made the eight list, but, uh, I don't think I'm going to be moving forward. And if I do, I might be just transitioning into the national guard if they can approve my tattoo waivers. So I'm kind of in imbalance right now, what I want to do with the rest of my career, whether I want it ready to walk away or continue to do it. But, um, that's something I, you know, I'm currently in

the position of trying to figure that one out and see what's the pros and cons of staying in and getting out.

Vincent Vargas ([03:55](#)):

But that's pretty much that's me and where I'm at and then what I do for a living, uh, I would guess I could say I'm an actor, you know, you know, um, I became a single dad in 2012 and before then, I didn't, you know, I can tell you right now and I, I didn't know my kids from anything. I knew their names, you know, I couldn't tell you how much they weighed when they were born. I still can't, you know, I could barely remember their birthdays at that time. I was so dedicated to work. I was so dedicated to just bringing home more money that I lost all connection with my kids. And, um, that has haunted me forever. It's still to this day, like just recently I had a newborn and my daughter goes dead. How many days was I in the hospital?

Vincent Vargas ([04:53](#)):

And I was like, dude, I have no idea. And that like kills me, cause this is going to be a conversation for the rest of their lives. Like dad, remember this? I'm like, no, dad, did you teach me how to ride a bike? No, what was my first words? I have no idea. You know what I mean? And like that's on and on and on my first four kids and like nothing, it's a, it's a blank slate for me. Um, and I don't know why it's just gone. There's nothing there for it. And I remember the long drive from Texas, from Arizona to Texas. And, um, you know, for some reason I was, I knew that they have just been handed off to me for circumstances that were just the, whatever they were, right. I'm not here to talk about or good or anything. But when you go on this long drive and I realized that one day, they're going to ask questions about this drive. And they're gonna ask questions. Who, what, when, where why?

Vincent Vargas ([05:55](#)):

And I had to be the best version of myself for them, you know? And so at that as I, I already right away, I felt bad for them. I felt bad for the situation. And I had to be me like they needed. I'm all they have right now. Like for the, for the, for, for this moment until however long, this last it's just me. Holy crap. I gotta be mom and dad. I gotta be mom and dad to girls and boys, preteen girls and little boys who still can't potty train. Right. You know what I mean? And I barely changed the diaper when they were little. So I'm like, here we go. And so on the drive, you know, I remember playing some just fun music and I'm acting goofy me, but aversion, they've never seen it. Never seen death, be the fun guy. They've seen Dad be stern in and out paying the bills and going back to work. And my daughter goes, man, dad, she was probably six or seven at the time. and goes, Dad, you're really funny.

Vincent Vargas ([07:02](#)):

And that was like, I almost started crying. Cause I was like, Oh my God. Like all these years of telling people, yeah, those are my kids and saying, yeah, I'm a dad and all this bull crap. I was feeding people, posing pictures of these kids that barely even took the time to get to know, you know, it hit me. Like I suck, you know, I'm a dad, but like, am I relevant? Like, do they care? Like what are their memories of me? Cause a guarantee it's not fucking teach them how to ride a bike, tying a shoe, knowing their first words, getting him a giggle, tickling, lifting them up, throwing them in the air, catching them like nothing. They don't have those memories of me and I can guarantee it. And that's sad as all hell. I've been chasing that guilt ever since like chasing it, like spending time.

Vincent Vargas ([07:53](#)):

Like I might be over the top now. Cause I swear to you. I'm like all, I'm all involved. I'm asking questions. Sometimes I tell them like, tell me about your boyfriend. I don't have one. Are you sure? Cause it's all good. You know what I mean? I'm doing everything I can now. And I've been doing this for since 2012, I've been fully engulfed, fully engaged in instill making those, those strides back into work. Right. And still, you know, it scares me every time I go to go to Mayans because I'm like, Oh my God, am I doing it again? You know what I mean? And it scares me. So I fly home every weekend, bro on my own dime. And I don't like when I say my own damn like, bro, we don't, I don't make enough money as it is as a Mayan. Cause I'm a new actor, but I still, I still budget every weekend. I'm flying home to see the kids. That's how profound that feeling of guilt is inside of me.

Vincent Vargas ([08:47](#)):

You know? I don't know. I think I've planted a lot of seeds and I'm hoping some of these seeds now start to come, come, come pay back dividends. In the end, you know, I got lead singer whiskey and I got war fighter tobacco and I got a barbershop and these are just seeds that are hopefully one day. One of them is a retirement plan currently right now I don't have one. You know what I mean? I'm just going to continue to push my writing as far as it'll go. Whether it be in music, whether it be in poems, whether it be in books, whether it be in scripts, doesn't matter. Wherever that writing goes. It goes, whether it be in public speaking, you know, um, I'm going to continue just to try and leave a good message out there. And you know, the truth is things fall right on my lap when you don't expect it.

Vincent Vargas ([09:30](#)):

You know what I mean? There's going to be a call for speaking engagement. There's going to be a call for a new, a new character. Someone wants me to play. There's going to be the call for another person. Want me to help them in a business that might be successful? Not worried about that. I've made enough relationships in life that I'm fine. You know, it's whatever I do focus on, it has to make sense. Financially has to make sense. Is it going to be good for the family? It has to make sense. I get calls every day about something nice. Nothing excites me anymore. You know what I mean? Like, you know, if it's gonna, if it's gonna be in the space of helping others, I'm interested. But at the same time, if it takes too much of my time, I'm not interested. And I have turned down a lot of stuff because look, man, I didn't, I didn't go work in LA for the last six months because I'm home with my kids. You know, every other actors in LA working from one job to the next to the next right now, I feel like I'm living the dream. I fly into mind. I go home and get a regular job. I'm home every night for dinner. I coach my kids in wrestling. I play catch with them at night. That's a win, win, win right there. And it's just not normal, but that's just the way I'm going to let it.

Vincent Vargas ([10:43](#)):

I think, I think Vincent and Rocco are now synonymous. I don't think there's a Rocco character that people are anticipating. I think Rocco and fence at the same people nowadays, I think it's finally blended to the point where you call me Vince, you call me Rocco. You expect the same guy. You know, I think back in the day they expected Rocco to drink fricking whiskey and party with them and all that stuff. I think now everyone knows Rocko and Vince at the same exact person. You know? So there's no, I don't feel any kind of pressure to put on a show for anyone. Cause I've always told people like I'm not a monkey. Don't tell me when to dance. That's not how this works. I'm a grown ass man. And like you, you know what to expect from me. I stay home at night because I enjoy being home, watching movies at the family and chilling out.

Vincent Vargas ([11:20](#)):

I don't go out and drink. I've been sober for a year. So it's like me. This is me, dude. There's no, there's no ever been a social pressure to be someone I'm not, you know, early on. I think social media kind of pushes you to do that. Trying to push you to chase likes and followers and all that. I don't give a crap, dude. I posted it the hell I want when I want, I like to post, I like to post, I really enjoy posting and seeing people's reactions to like, like, Oh here's my, my, my daughter was a state champ. It's really beautiful to watch. People will say, man, what an inspiration. Oh, that's so awesome. Good job dad. Like, thank you. I'm proud of my kids. I'm proud of, um, being on the cover of skillset magazine, what an honor, that, that was for me and it's not boastful.

Vincent Vargas ([12:01](#)):

It's just like, wow, man, that's really cool that they, you can recognize that I'm working hard and that's all it is. People recognizing hard work and at the same time other veterans and realizing like, Oh man, I can do that too. Right? So there is no pressure on that end to be something the pressure for me is continued to try and do great things and continuing to push myself in areas. I've never expected to push myself because that pressure is, if I'm up here talking to veterans, tell them to be motivated, tell them to go do things, tell them to step out of their comfort zones, telling them to stop freaking, you know, identifying as just a veteran, be more within shit. I need to be going and doing the same thing.

Vincent Vargas ([12:46](#)):

I still struggle with things, right? Like I, I go to a PTSD clinic and just recently been telling people this, cause I'm like, whatever, I'm not going to hide who I am. And I have this weird, you know, the psych dudes calling it a flashback. When I, when, when I it's hard for me to, it's a hard pill to swallow, right? Like I'm hung up on something obviously. But like calling a flashback that's movie shit right in my head. But um, I have an issue with, um, burns. I did work on a family of burns in Afghanistan and it was in the cash. Like on the days off with being an army ranger infantry dude, I volunteered my time in the, in the casualty collection points and I provided medical help. You know, I had a background EMT and so, you know, I did everything I could and here comes a family of seven and they're burned miserably bad.

Vincent Vargas ([13:38](#)):

We start the process of giving them ketamine to, to put, take away the pain. And then we started scrubbing all the skin off their bodies. That's damaged. And then add silvadene to it, and then wrap it up and hopefully they come back the next day from about two weeks straight, man, we're just losing one after the other. And I'm gaining, I'm building rapport with these kids. They're smiling at me. They know my face. And to know like one after the other is dying I would leave there every day and just smelling like burned flesh, and it stuck in your nose. And you remember that and the smiles in their faces and having kids the same similar age, it was a, it was heavy for me for, for, you know, a 25, 26 year old kid. Never expected that it was heavy. And I didn't know, it would weigh so much on me and it does man.

Vincent Vargas ([14:20](#)):

And it does still to this day. So just recently my, my son and we have the newborn and my oldest, my son, that's in the house for now, he's 10. He wanted to help. And um, he said, he'd go heat up the bottle. And in my head, I'm like, there should be no issues with heating up the bottle. Right. I'm super cautious about everything. I'm like, I, he, he, he can get this. He can figure this out. Okay, I'm gonna let him do it. So I'm in the room, brushing my teeth, getting ready for, for work. And they're getting ready for school. And I hear him scream and the scream made my stomach drop. And like I instantly knew what

happened. I knew he burned himself. And in my head, I'm seeing these kids already and I'm screaming at the top of my lungs. What the fuck happened?

Vincent Vargas ([15:05](#)):

And I was gone, bro. I wasn't there. I was screaming over him. Not even at him, like in this really weird manner, not even checking on him, not, not even nothing like completely gone. And my wife takes over and does her part as of what a mom should do and what a dad probably should have done. And she right away pulled me to the side. She was sit down and I was like, what's wrong? She goes, you weren't here. And if it ate me alive, dude, and it's eating me alive now thinking of it because, because my son went to school, um, my son went to school without me even checking on him. You know what I mean? And I imagined this dude and it's just like, what the fuck's wrong with dad? Like the daddy would give a fuck. You know what I mean? And in that, that sucks.

Vincent Vargas ([15:56](#)):

That sucks for a kid to have a dad who, who loses himself on certain moments. And that, that shit fucking bothers me. It bothers me because I don't want them to have this residual effects of, of, of dad, you know, uh, you know, the better parts of me, you know, I tell people like sometimes I feel like the better parts of me had left in a war, man, because I didn't want this side of me coming home, you know? And, um, and it makes me emotional because like, it sucks, dude. It's not the version of dad. I want them to see, I also know I am here completely out of control with that. Like, there's nothing I could have done to stop that. So I've recognized that I needed to help. Um, and so I started doing counseling again and be like, Hey dude, fix this.

Vincent Vargas ([16:43](#)):

Right. Um, and so I, you know, I came home two days later and it had it, we had a fan, we have do these family dinners. I bought this giant table and we all sit there and have family dinners, which is a beautiful thing. I hope we never stopped doing. Then I actually took the moment to say, Hey, I'm not sure how many of you at this table need to know this or need to hear this. But, um, I struggle with posttraumatic stress and it's not my older ones are like, huh. Right. And I'm like, it's not like what you would see in TV shows in the movie. A few of them were, were in the room at the time when I'm just like you losing it. And my oldest one goes, Oh, I know dad. I know this is why you get like that.

Vincent Vargas ([17:23](#)):

Sometimes I know how I know when you're, when you're, when you're gone, I get it. And that was nice to hear, you know, and then I had my 14 year old who goes, I had no idea and that fucked me up, dude. Cause again, I'm like, you know, we don't know we do as parents, we were just trying to go out to, to be the best influence for them. And they see everything, they feel everything and whatever they choose to take with them in the future is theirs. You know? And that's, that's just whatever they end up taking. And, um, I'm blessed to be able to have had that conversation with them now. So hopefully there's a little bit of a justification for, for why I might lose myself at moments. And hopefully it's a little bit of comfort for them to be like, it's okay, because that's something that dad deals with. Right. And not that I'm just this complete jerk and don't care about the means of their bodies and the health and everything else. And so, um, that's been a challenge, man. That's been a challenge that more recently has been affecting me. And I think because I've ignored it for so long, um, it rears its ugly head at the worst moments.

Vincent Vargas ([18:39](#)):

You know, I just trying to like, I mean, I guess in everyone else's eyes, I'm an actor because what I do on TV, but for me, um, I can't, I guess I personally am not completely happy with what I've done in acting to even consider myself an actor. Um, you know, I have lines here and there I'm on a major TV show, but I don't feel like I've been given the opportunity to show my actual range as an actor. And I can't tell you there's one scene where I can say I'm super proud of. And I think people can, you know, I guess it's more like a never been, I want to care what other people think about me, but at the same time, uh, I'm in a interesting position where there's a lot of, maybe it's me putting the pressure on myself, but there's a lot of pressure and being one of the only veteran in acting currently.

Vincent Vargas ([19:31](#)):

And, and I can tell you that I, like I said, I haven't been proud of any of the scenes where I can say, yeah, that took a lot of work and effort and that's some serious acting where someone can come in and watch it and be like, cool, that dude is an actor, you know? And I think I'm still waiting on that opportunity to present itself for me to really sit down and say, yeah, I'm an actor. Cause right now I feel, um, you know, and with all respect to acting, I still need to earn that opportunity. I, you know, I can't sit here and expect them to just give it to me. I'm new, you know, I'm the, I'm the, the, the, you know, I'm a private in a world surrounded by it. NCOs and acting, you know what, I'm still trying to earn my stripes. And so, uh, I'm not by any means saying, I deserve it. I'm saying when I do deserve it, uh, I'm excited to, to put all the emotions on the line and do my acting. And I think at that point, I think I'd be more comfortable calling myself an actor.

Vincent Vargas ([20:33](#)):

You know, I think part of me would love to retire as a sergeant major and what I've originally was my goal and not completing that goal that I've set out for myself is a little frustrating. I just feel like I sold myself short. So it's dealing with, you know, I know I'm to think about that a lot. Uh, as well as I know, I don't have the time to, to, to be the soldier. I know I can be, you know, I'm not presenting myself in a manner what I did when I first got in, I mean, gung-ho a hundred percent volunteer for everything. Uh, I'm now the guy that shies away from deployments, right? I'm the guy that shies away from, from a long time, the long since have been gone from home. And so, um, it feels ugly sometimes to be that kind of a person who chooses family first, even though it's the right choice, I feel bad, you know, and I'm a person who I feel everything, dude, and I'm not sure if that's from just the life experiences I've had, but I feel bad.

Vincent Vargas ([21:29](#)):

I feel when I feel bad when I am not pulling my weight per se, I feel bad if I'm not displaying the best version of myself. I mean, I feel bad as a dad being gone working, even though it's helps the family, I feel bad, you know, and I feel bad calling myself an actor when I feel like I haven't been able to really portray myself as an actor because I feel like the community kind of is watching, you know? And so I feel bad, you know what I mean? So I do put a lot of pressure on myself and I think, and that's okay. Part of it is what drives me, you know, to try and be better. But sometimes putting that pressure on myself makes life a little bit more challenging, stressful. I don't, you know, throughout all the years and like, you know, this is part of the story of my story and everything is, you know, part of being involved with article 15 stuff has really opened my eyes to what, what really matters, right?

Vincent Vargas ([22:27](#)):

Being an influence in veteran eyes in the veteran community is, is now my position in life. And it's been cool. Cause I hadn't, for years, I didn't want to change. I'm Rocco. I'm the guy that hangs out with article 15 crew. I'm the guy that, you know, we're, I'm part of the guys and you started looking at reflecting back on life. And I look at my mom and I looked at my dad and I look at my grandparents and I look at everyone in my life. And I look at my life up to this point. It's everyone. At some point, you know, it's kind of that fork in the road. We have our choices and whatever direction you choose, it's a risk. And so I think the way I've got to where I'm at now is being willing to risk. And so I say that because the guy who walked away from a seven year career as a federal agent with retirement, in our opinion, and in the highest position in my life, I walked away for an opportunity to help more veterans to in some way I wasn't sure, but that's kind of what sparked from, from the whole article 15 days.

Vincent Vargas ([23:26](#)):

And so I risked it, I risked everything. I lost somewhere around, you know, close to \$10,000 a month. Right. A huge income cut because I wanted to, I grew in a direction that was probably different from everyone else, but it was the direction that was good for me.

Vincent Vargas ([23:45](#)):

I'm a, I'm a man of faith, you know? And I feel like there's, there's always room to, to earn more points to, to, to the man of above and say, I'm trying to do right. Cause I wasn't always walking that path, you know? And so it just, it just, nothing fills me more with more joy than knowing I can help someone with just, even if it's just time taking a phone call, answering an email, sending a text and, and that has turned into like, okay, talk about those top five. Let's talk about the top five military influences or how many of those guys are out there helping. I don't know. I don't pay attention, then I'm not competing with any of them, but I know I am because I think we need that. I think there needs to be more leaders in our community and leading by example, by leading from the front and not leading by marketing, marketing tactics and an alcoholic slumber parties or whatever the hell, right?

Vincent Vargas ([24:40](#)):

Like, like we are youth are, and not just our kids, but our soldiers are our airmen on, you know, every military branch are impressionable, right? There are a lot of young kids looking for people to look up to and you know, everybody has their way of doing it. And this is my mine is being the dad being, being, being transparent, open about my life and the mistakes I've made and how I fixed them and how I continue to make them, you know what I mean? And just being honest, my net, my message is, is just evolved throughout the years to more and more and the deeper thought process. And I tell people like, look, man, if all they ever say is I'm a veteran. I feel like that. Imagine that being a 20 pound weight, you know, and I'm an infantry guy, 20 pound weight, but I'm going to range at 20 pound weight.

Vincent Vargas ([25:27](#)):

How much girls? Aren't 20 pound weight. It's a lot of weight I'm carrying just to try to identify as one type of person. Truth is you peel all those weights off. It's a lot easier to live your life without the, without the ideologies of you need to be this type of person. So I haven't took on, I've taken off all the weight, I've dumped it all off. I don't want I'm everything and nothing at once, dude. You know what I mean? I say I'm a veteran, but I'm also not, you know, I'm a dude, I'm a man, I'm a father, I'm a husband. And those don't carry a lot of weight genuinely. You can do whatever the hell you want in your life. Genuinely like, you know, a lot of guys, a lot of veterans are gonna listen to this. A lot of veterans and a lot of veterans are in different stages of their transition.



Vincent Vargas ([26:09](#)):

Some early on some are wearing the veteran hats and we're not wearing the veteran, had some hate the veteran world, some don't hate the veteran world, like everyone's in their different, like, it's like everyone's in their different stages of grieving a military career. You know what I mean? And, and you know, all the stage agreements, everyone's in their different stages of it. You know, some take 20 years sometimes only take two. But, um, in the end, when they're, when they're past it all, they can accept like that, that time that side's done, it's time to do more. Um, they can look around and say like, you know what? There is nothing out there that I can't do without all the things that I've learned, not just in the military, but before and now. And after there's nothing out there, I can't put my mind towards and accomplish absolutely nothing.

Vincent Vargas ([26:49](#)):

And I can prove that by looking at this dyslexic, dumb ass Vincent Vargas, look what he's doing. You know what I mean? Like genuinely think it's like, look at this guy. If this knucklehead, this dude can do it. Anyone can do it like straight up dude, hard work dedication. You're going to lose a lot. You're going to, you're gonna fail a ton. But that whole matter, man, if you want something bad enough, I believe there's a tipping point for everyone. You work hard enough in that area. Something's gonna happen. Something's going to happen. You know what I mean? And you gotta be real with yourself as well. You know, I don't become an actor because I'm a veteran. They didn't say, Hey veteran, wouldn't give you a chance. No, that's not how it happened. I did study. I practice, I trained, I showed up ready to rock and I fucking got the part. You know what I mean? And it's like, every one of you guys out there who's listening can accomplish any theme, like swear, do you want to be a doctor? Do it. You know, you want to be a lawyer to do it. I want to be an accurate do it, but you got to do the work. You gotta do the work, man.

Vincent Vargas ([27:53](#)):

Go check out my Instagram, Vincent Rocco Vargas. It's Vincent dot Rocco dot Vargas. You can go to my Facebook, same fencer, Rocco Vargas. You can even Google Vincent and Rocco Vargas. And you'll find all my social media platforms, um, easy to get ahold of you messaged me. I answer. It's just there's. There's no doubt about that. Everybody who messaged me, they get, they get a reply. They get that kind of time. Um, I got a podcast called the Vinny rock podcast, V I N N Y R O C. That's on every podcast platform you can think of. And uh, you know, I sell, I sell my books online, all that. You can find it all, all my stuff's just, uh, hit 'em up. And um, you know, you guys are struggling with transition. I wrote a book, not a very smart man. So it's an easy read. It's called light the fuse. You can get it on my website as well. And so it's, so these are things that I've put out there for the world to hopefully can help guide people and learn from my own mistakes.

Rod Rodriguez ([28:48](#)):

Balance is hard. Vincent is reminded of the challenge of balancing work life and home life. With every plane ticket he buys so that he can tuck his kids into bed every night. That's tough for anyone to do, but when you prioritize change in your life and you're serious about it, well, it's like Rocco said, genuinely, you can do whatever the hell you want in your life, but you got to do the work.

Rod Rodriguez ([29:16](#)):

Vet stories connecting that's production. This episode was produced and recorded by me. Rod Rodriguez, executive produced by Ellis. Masumi go to connecting vets today to find the late breaking



news that matters to veterans that matters to you. You'll also find our other podcasts, the back brief where every Friday we recap the veteran news. You might've missed. We do it in about 10 minutes. Go to connecting vets.com and get connected today. Do you have a vet you want to share? Email me at rod at connecting vets dot com. Send me a message on Twitter at vet story podcast, all of the links will be in the show notes. I'm rod Rodriguez, this was vet story.